

# The Price of Liberty

OR, A MIDNIGHT CALL

## CHAPTER X.—(Continued.)

As to the lady, who was tall and handsome, with dark eyes and features contrasting strangely with hair as white as the frost on a winter's landscape, there was a far-away, strained look in the dark eyes, as if they were eyes of night and day looking for something, something that would never be found. In herself the lady was clean and wholesome enough, but her evening dress of black silk and lace was dropping into fragments, the lace was in rags upon her bosom, though there were diamonds of great value in her white hair.

And here, strangely allied, were wealth and direst poverty: the whole place was filled with rare and costly things, pictures, statuary, china; the floors were covered with thick carpets, and yet everything was absolutely smothered in dust. A thick, white, blanket cloud of it lay everywhere. It obscured the china, it dimmed the glasses of the pictures, it piled in file drifts on the heads and arms of the dingy statues there. Many years must have passed since a housemaid's brush or duster had touched anything in Longdean Grange. It was like a palace of the Sleeping Beauty, wherein people walked as in a waking dream.

The lady of the house made her way slowly to the dining-room. Here dinner was laid out daintily and artistically enough—a gourmet would have drawn up to the table with a feeling of satisfaction. Flowers were there, and silver and cut-glass, china with a history of its own, and the whole set out on a table cloth that was literally dropping to pieces.

It was a beautiful room in itself, lofty, oak panelled from floor to roof, with a few pictures of price on the walls. There was plenty of gleaming silver glowing like an argent moon against a purple sky, and yet the same sense of dust and desolation was everywhere. Only the dinner looked bright and modern.

There were two other people standing by the table, one a girl with a handsome, intellectual face full of passion but ill repressed; the other the big fair man known to the village as "Mr. Charles." As a matter of fact, his name was Reginald Henson, and he was distantly related to Mrs. Henson, the strange chateleine of the House of the Silent Sorrow. He was smiling blandly now at Enid Henson, the wonderfully beautiful girl with the defiant, shining eyes.

"We may be seated now that madam is arrived," Henson said, gravely.

He spoke with a mocking humility and a queer wry smile on his broad, loose mouth that filled Enid with a speechless fury. The girl was hot-blooded—a good hater and a good friend. And the master passion of her life was hatred of Reginald Henson.

"Madam has had a refreshing rest?" Henson suggested. "Pardon our anxious curiosity."

Again Enid raged, but Margaret Henson might have been of stone for all the notice she took. The far-away look was still in her eyes as she felt her way to the table like one in a dream. Then she dropped suddenly into a chair and began grace in a high, clear voice.

"And the Lord make us truly thankful. And may He, when it seemeth good to Him, remove the curse from this house and in due season free the innocent and punish the guilty. For the burden is sore upon us, and there are times when it seems hard to bear."

The big man played with his knife and fork, smilingly. An acute observer might have imagined that the passionate plaint was directed at him. If so it passed harmlessly over his broad shoulders. In his immaculate evening dress he looked strangely out of place there. Enid had escaped the prevailing dilapidation, but her gown of grey homespun was severe as the garb of a charity girl.

"Madam is so poetical," Henson murmured. "And charmingly sanguine."

"Williams," Mrs. Henson said, quite stolidly, "my visitor will have some champagne."

She seemed to have dropped once again into the commonplace, painfully exact as a hostess of breeding must be to an unwelcome guest. And yet she never seemed to see him; those dark eyes were looking, ever looking, into the dark future. The meal proceeded in silence save for an oily sarcasm from Henson. In the dense stillness the occasional howl of a dog could be heard. A slight flush of annoyance crossed Henson's broad face.

"Some day I shall poison all those hounds," he said.

Enid looked up at him swiftly. "If all the hounds round Longdean were poisoned or shot it would be a good place to live in," she said.

Henson smiled carelessly, like Petrarch might have done in his milder moments.

"My dear Enid, you misjudge me," he said. "But I shall get justice some day."

Enid replied that she fervently hoped so, and thus the strange meal proceeded with smiles and gentle words from Henson, and a wild outburst of bitterness from the girl. So far as she was concerned the servants might have been mere automatons. The dust rose in clouds as the latter moved silently. It was hot in there, and gradually the brown powder grimed like a film over Henson's oily skin. At the head of the table Margaret Henson sat like a woman in a dream. Ever, ever her dark eyes seemed to be looking eagerly around. Thirsty men seeking precious water in a desert might have looked like her. Even and anon her lips moved, but no sound came from them. Occasionally she spoke to one or the other of her guests, but she never followed her words with her eyes. Such a sad, pathetic, pitiable figure, such a gray sorrow in her rags and snowy hair.

The meal came to an end at length, and Mrs. Henson rose suddenly. There was a grotesque suggestion of the marionette in the movement. She bowed as if to some imaginary personage and moved with dignity towards the door. Reginald Henson stood aside and opened it for her. She passed into the dim hall as if absolutely unconscious of his presence. Enid flashed a look of defiance at him as she disappeared into the gloom and floating dust.

Henson's face changed instantly, as if a mask had fallen from his snug features. He became alert and vigorous. He was no longer patron of the arts, a wide-minded philanthropist, the man who devotes himself to the good of humanity. The blue eyes were cold and cruel, there was a hungry look about the loose mouth.

"Take a bottle of clout and the cigars into the small library, Williams," he said. "And open the window, the dust stifles me."

The dignified butler bowed respectfully. He resembled the typical bad butler of fiction in no respect, but his thoughts were by no means pleasant as he hastened to obey. Enid was loitering in the hall as Williams passed with the tray.

"Small study and the window open, miss," he whispered. "There's some game on—oh, yes, there is some blessed game on again to-night. And him so anxious to know how Miss Christiana is. Says she ought to call him in professionally. Personally I'd rather call in an undertaker who was desperately hard up for a job."

"All right, Williams," Enid replied. "My sister is worse to-night. And unless she gets better I shall insist upon her seeing a doctor. And I am obliged for the hint about Mr. Henson. The little study commands the staircase leading to my sister's bedroom."

"And the open window commands the garden," Williams said, drily. "Yes, yes. Now go. You are a real friend, Williams, and I will never forget your goodness. Run along—I can actually feel that man coming."

As a matter of fact, Henson was approaching noiselessly. Despite his great bulk he had the clean, dainty step of a cat; his big, rolling ears were those of a hare. Henson was always listening. He would have listened behind a kitchen door to a pair chattering scullery-maids. He liked to find other people out, though as yet he had not been found out himself. He stood before the world as a social missionary, he made speeches at religious gatherings and affected the women to tears. He was known to devote a considerable fortune to doing good; he had been asked to stand for Parliament, where his real ambition lay. Gilead Gates had alluded to Reginald Henson as his right hand man.

He crept along to the study, where the lamps were lighted and the silver claret-jug set out. He carefully dusted a big arm-chair and began to smoke, having first carefully extinguished the lamps and seen that the window leading to the garden was wide open. Henson was watching for something. In his feline nature he had the full gift of feline patience. To serve his own ends he would have sat there watching all night if necessary. He heard an occasional whimper, a howl from one of the dogs; he heard Enid's voice singing in the drawing-room. The rest of the house was quite funeral enough for him.

In the midst of the drawing-room Margaret Henson sat still as a statue. The distant, weary expression never left her eyes for a moment. As the stable clock, the only one going on the premises, struck ten Enid crossed over from the piano to her aunt's side. There was an eager look on her face, her eyes were gleaming like frosty stars.

"Aunt," she whispered; "dear, I have had a message!"

"Message of woe and desolation," Margaret Henson cried. "Tribulation and sorrow on this wretched house. For seven years the hand of the Lord has lain heavily upon us." She spoke like one who was far away from her surroundings. And

yet no one could look in her eyes and say that she was mad. It was a proud, passionate spirit, crushed down by some bitter humiliation. Enid's eyes flashed.

"That scoundrel has been robbing you again," she said.

"Two thousand pounds," came the mechanical reply, "to endow a bed in some hospital. And there is no escape, no hope unless we drag the shameful secret from him. Bit by bit and drop by drop, and then I shall die and you and Christiana will be penniless."

"I dare say Chris and myself will survive that," Enid said, cheerfully. "But we have a plan, dear aunt; we have thought it out carefully. Reginald Henson has hidden the secret somewhere and we are going to find it. The secret is hidden not far off, because our cousin has occasion to require it frequently. It is like the poisoned letter in Edgar Poe's wonderful story."

Margaret Henson nodded and mumbled. It seemed almost impossible to make her understand. She bled of strange things, with her dark eyes ever fixed on the future. Enid turned away almost despairingly. At the same time the stable clock struck the half-hour after ten. Williams slipped in with a tray of glasses, noiselessly. On the tray lay a small pile of tradesman's books. The top one was of dull red with no lettering upon it at all.

"The housekeeper's respectful compliments, Miss, and would you go through them to-morrow?" Williams said. He tapped the top book significantly. "To-morrow is the last day of the month."

Enid picked up the top book with strange eagerness. There were pages of figures and cabalistic entries that no ordinary person could make anything of. Pages here and there were signed and decorated with pink receipt stamps. Enid glanced down the last column and her face grew a little paler.

"Aunt," she whispered, "I've got to go out. At once; do you understand? There is a message here; and I am afraid that something dreadful has happened. Can you sing?"

"Ah, yes; a song of lamentation—a dirge for the dead."

"No, no; seven years ago you had a lovely voice. I recollect what a pleasure it was to me as a child; and they used to say that my voice was very like yours, only not so sweet or so powerful. Aunt, I must go out; and that man must know nothing about it. He is by the window in the small library now, watching—watching. Help me, for the love of Heaven, help me."

The girl spoke with a fervency and passion that seemed to waken a responsive chord in Margaret Henson's breast. A brighter gleam crept into her eyes.

"You are a dear girl," she said, dreamily; "yes, a dear girl. And I loved singing; it was a great grief to me that they would not let me go upon the stage. But I haven't sung since—since that—"

She pointed to the huddled heap of china and glass and dried, dusty flowers in one corner. Enid shuddered slightly as she followed the direction of the extended forefinger.

"But you must try," she whispered. "It is for the good of the family, for the recovery of the secret. Reginald Henson is sly and cruel and clever. But we have one on our side now who is far more clever. And, unless I can get away tonight without that man knowing, the chance may be lost for ever. Come!"

Margaret commenced to sing in a soft minor. At first the chords were thin and dry, but gradually they increased in sweetness and power. The hopeless, distant look died from the singer's eyes; there was a flush on her cheeks that rendered her years younger.

"Another one," she said, when the song was finished, "and yet another. How wicked I have been to neglect this ballad that God sent me all these years. If you only knew what the sound of my own voice means to me! Another one, Enid."

"Yes, yes," Enid whispered. "You are to sing till I return. You are to leave Henson to imagine that I am singing. He will never guess. Now then."

Enid crept away into the hall, closing the door softly behind her. She made her way noiselessly from the house and across the lawn. As Henson slipped through the open window into the garden Enid darted behind a bush. Evidently Henson suspected nothing so far as she was concerned, for she could see the red glow of the cigar between his lips. The faint sweetness of distant music filled the air. So long as the song continued Henson would relax his vigilance.

He was pacing down the garden in the direction of the drive. Did the man know anything? Enid wondered. He had so diabolically cunning a brain. He seemed to find out everything, and to read others before they had made up their minds for themselves.

The cigar seemed to dance like a mocking sprite into the bushes. Usually the man avoided those bushes. If Reginald Henson was afraid of one thing it was of the dogs. And in return they hated him as he hated them.

Enid's mind was made up. If the sound of that distant voice should only cease for a moment she was quite sure Henson would turn back. But he could hear it, and she knew that she was safe. Enid slipped past him into the bushes and gave a faint click of her lips. Something moved and whined, and two dark objects bounded towards her. She caught them together by their col-

lars and cuffed them soundly. Then she led the way back so as to get on Henson's tracks.

He was walking on ahead of her now, beating time softly to the music of the faintly distant song with his cigar. Enid could distinctly see the sweep of the red circle.

"Hold him, Dan," she whispered. "Watch, Gerance, watch, boy."

There was a low growl as the hounds found the scent and dashed forward. Henson came up all standing and sweating in every pore. It was not the first time he had been held up by the dogs, and he knew by hard experience what to expect if he made a bolt for it.

Two grim muzzles were pressed against his trembling knees; he saw four rows of ivory flashing in the dim light. Then the dogs crouched at his feet, watching him with eyes as red and lurid as the point of his own cigar. Had he attempted to move, had he tried coercion, they would have fallen upon him and torn him in pieces.

"Confusion to the creatures!" he cried, passionately. "I'll get a revolver; I'll buy some prussic acid and poison the lot. And here I'll have to stay till Williams locks up the stables. Wouldn't that little Jezebel laugh at me if she could see me now? She would enjoy it better than singing songs in the drawing-room to our sainted Margaret. Steady, you brutes! I didn't move."

He stood there rigidly, almost afraid to take the cigar from his lips whilst Enid sped without further need for caution down the drive. The lodge-gates were closed and the deaf porter's house in darkness, so that Enid could unlock the wicket without fear of detection. She rattled the key on the bars and a figure slipped out of the darkness.

"Good heavens, Ruth, is it really you?" Enid cried.

"Really me, Enid. I came over on my bicycle. I am supposed to be round at some friend's house in Brunswick Square, and one of the servants is sitting up for me. Is Reginald safe? He hasn't yet discovered the secret of the tradesman's book?"

"That's all right, dear. But why are you here? Has something dreadful happened?"

"Well, I will try to tell you so in as few words as possible. I never felt so ashamed of anything in my life."

"Don't tell me that our scheme has failed!"

"Perhaps I need not go so far as that. The first part of it came off all right, and then a very dreadful thing happened. We have got Mr. David Steel into frightful trouble. He is going to be charged with attempted murder and robbery."

"Ruth! But, tell me. I am quite in the dark."

"It was the night when—well, you know the night. It was after Mr. Steel returned home from his visit to 219, Brunswick Square—"

"You mean 218, Ruth."

"It doesn't matter, because he knows pretty well all about it by this time. It would have been far better for us if we hadn't been quite so clever. It would have been far wiser to have taken Mr. Steel entirely into our confidence. Oh, oh, Enid, if we had only left out that little sentiment over the cigar-case! Then we should have been all right."

"Dearest girl, my time is limited. I've got Reginald held up for the time, but at any moment he may escape from his bondage. What about the cigar-case?"

"Well, Mr. Steel took it home with him. And when he got home he found a man nearly murdered lying in his conservatory. That man was conveyed to the Sussex County Hospital, where he still lies in an unconscious state. On the body was found a receipt for a gun-metal cigar case set with diamonds."

"Good gracious, Ruth, you don't mean to say—"

"Oh, I do. I can't quite make out how it happened, but that same case that—well, that Mr. Steel has—has been positively identified as one purchased from Walsen by the injured man. There is no question about it. And they have found out about Mr. Steel being short of money, and the £1,000, and everything."

"But we know that that cigar-case from Lockhart's in North Street was positively—"

"Yes, yes. But what has become of that? And in what strange way was the change made? I tell you that the whole thing frightened me. We thought that we had hit upon a scheme to solve the problem and keep our friends out of danger. There was the American at Genoa who volunteered to assist us. A week later he was found dead in his bed. Then there was Christiana's friend, who disappeared entirely. And now we try further assistance in the case of Mr. Steel, and he stands face to face with a terrible charge. And he has found us out."

"He has found us out? What do you mean?"

"Well, he called to see me. He called at 219, of course. And directly I heard his name I was so startled that I am afraid I betrayed myself. Such a nice, kind handsome man, Enid; so manly and good over it all. Of course, he declared that he had been at 219 before, and I could only declare that he had done nothing of the kind. Never never have I felt so ashamed of myself in my life before."

"It seems a pity," Enid said, thoughtfully. "You said nothing about 218?"

"My dear, he found it out. At least Hatherly Bell did for him. Hatherly Bell happened to be staying down with us, and Hatherly Bell, who knows Mr. Steel, promptly solved, or

half solved, that side of the problem. And Hatherly Bell is coming here to-night to see Aunt Margaret. He—"

"Here!" Enid cried. "To see Aunt Margaret? Then he found out about you. At all hazards Mr. Bell must not come here—he must not. I would rather let everything go than that. I would rather see Aunt Margaret and Reginald Henson master here. You must—"

In the distance came the rattle of harness bells and the trot of a horse. "I'm afraid it's too late," Ruth Gates said, sadly. "I am afraid that they are here already. Oh, if we had only left out that wretched cigar-case!"

(To be Continued.)

## COMMUNISM IN CANADA

communism in Canada

### PROSPERITY OF THE DOUKHOBORS IN THE WEST.

Taking to Modern Ways—Transact Business Without Money.

A special from Winnipeg to the Globe draws attention to the progress and prosperity of the Doukhobors settled in the North-west. Their crops are better and further advanced than any in the same region. They are buying the most improved implements and machinery. They now own a 25 horse-power steam plough, six engines, two traction and four movable threshing machines, and no less than four saw mills, all of which are run by Doukhobor engineers.

Their genius and energy is not static, but structural and inventive. Without any knowledge of political science whatever, and with nothing but their Bibles, they have worked out a system of communism.

#### HOW THEY TRADE.

There are 45 villages, each village with a population of about 200 and with 40 homesteads of land; that is, there are between 8,000 and 10,000 Doukhobors altogether, settled on a solid block of six townships. Each village is a perfect community by itself. It has its blacksmith, its carpenter, its stables, its hennery, its mill, etc. If a Doukhobor wishes to get some eggs he simply has to go to the woman whose duty it is to keep the chickens, and she will give him his eggs for nothing. If he desires a pair of boots, he can get them from the "head man" of the village for nothing. If he wants a new house, he merely has to call in the village carpenters and they will build it for him free. Money has no value in the Doukhobor settlements.

#### A COMMON PURSE.

The profits from the year's crops, and even the individual earnings of Doukhobors working on the railways and elsewhere, go into a common purse, and with this money the supplies for the whole community are bought wholesale. The Doukhobors always buy wholesale at Winnipeg, considering the middleman's profit to be mere robbery. The oversight of the year's business is annually delegated to four commissioners, who do all the buying and selling and organizing in accordance with the wishes of the assembly. These commissioners are no higher than the ploughboys or the blacksmiths. When their term of office ceases they return to the plough or the carpenter's bench, where they came from.

The success with which the system is wrought is due to Peter Veregin, the Doukhobor leader, who spent 15 years in Siberia prisons.

#### NOT EAT FLESH.

The Doukhobors will not kill or eat any animal, believing that to be the teaching of the Bible: Thou shalt not kill. Some of them have gone so far as to preach that it is wrong to use horses and cattle for labor or to shear sheep, or to wear boots made of leather. It was in pursuance of this belief that they turned their horses and cattle loose two years ago and started on their naked pilgrimage. It was this belief that induced the women to harness themselves to the plough and the men to draw waggon loads of flour by hand.

The Doukhobors have no marriage laws, but marry and unmarried at pleasure, according to the agreeableness of the alliance. One is glad to say that this license is not abused and most of them live and die the husband of one wife. They will not register births, marriages or deaths, considering that an unwarrantable interference with the Almighty. They will not "make soldier," as they say, believing war to be a machination of the devil.

Jones—"I notice that your uncle left an estate of half a million."

Brown—"It was not his fault that he did." Jones—"What do you mean?"

Brown—"He would have taken it with him if he could."

"Fankly, madam," said the honest outfitter, "I wouldn't advise you to take that dress." "Why not?" asked the woman. "It doesn't match your complexion," he explained. "Oh, well," she replied carelessly, "I can change the complexion."

Mr. Goodley—"Mrs. Chatters is better, I hear. I'm glad you called on her to-day." Mrs. Goodley—"So am I. I was ushered into her room just as the doctor put the thermometer under her tongue and so for five full minutes I talked away at her and she couldn't say a word."